

1969-1989 Twenty Years of

Integrity

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September/October 1989

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Christian Imagination

Sometimes a scene from Christian fiction explains a spiritual truth so clearly and powerfully that both illustration and truth stick in your mind for the rest of your life. When, in *The Last Battle*, C.S. Lewis describes death as entry into a dark stable door which leads to a world of light, we feel comforted and less fearful. Satan's chilling malice and empty spitefulness is well illustrated in Lewis' *Perelandra* by Un-man, who tortuously keeps the exhausted hero from sleeping by repeating the hero's name over and over again. The power of godly love to win spiritual battles is retold afresh in Madeline L'Engle's book *A Wrinkle in Time* when the love of a sister saves her young brother's mind from the Enemy.

You likely have your own list of illustrations from books or films or paintings that enhance your understanding of God and His ways. In order to emphasize the essential place Christian artistic imagination has in our spiritual maturation, the *Integrity* board presents our first issue devoted entirely to Christian art. The contents of this issue were solicited, gathered and submitted by Jack Welch and Marjorie Wood. We think the editorial, articles and drawings offer plenty to ponder and to inspire.

God, the original artistic Creator, displays His artwork throughout the universe. The Scriptures are filled with poetry, stories, architectural symbolism, music and dance. When our thoughts and emotions cannot adequately be expressed, art can be a communication bridge between humans and our God — a shadow of the Logos (Word) Jesus Christ, who is the spiritual bridge that links us with each other and takes us to God.

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

I Peter 1:8-9

May you be blessed by this reading!

Bruce and Diane Kilmer
Co-Editors

A Dedicatory Prayer

GEORGE WALTON

Take not, oh Lord, our literal sense.
Lord, in thy great,
Unbroken speech our limping metaphor
translate.

— C.S. Lewis

Father, we thank you for the Word, the matchless metaphor sent to dwell with us as an image of yourself. And we thank you for every expression pointing us toward the Son. We ask your blessings upon these words of our belief and these figures from our faith.

We confess that our expressions cannot measure the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God; our images cannot uncover the unsearchable riches of Christ or the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

And so, our Father, as you receive our lesser creations, we beg you to translate our limping metaphors. Baptize each image with your glory. Shine in and through them, we pray.

And as we send them forth for human sight, we pray that those with eyes to see may see the image of your son — the image of yourself — in whom we pray. Amen.

George Walton is chairman of the Department of English at Abilene Christian University.

Traveler's Aid

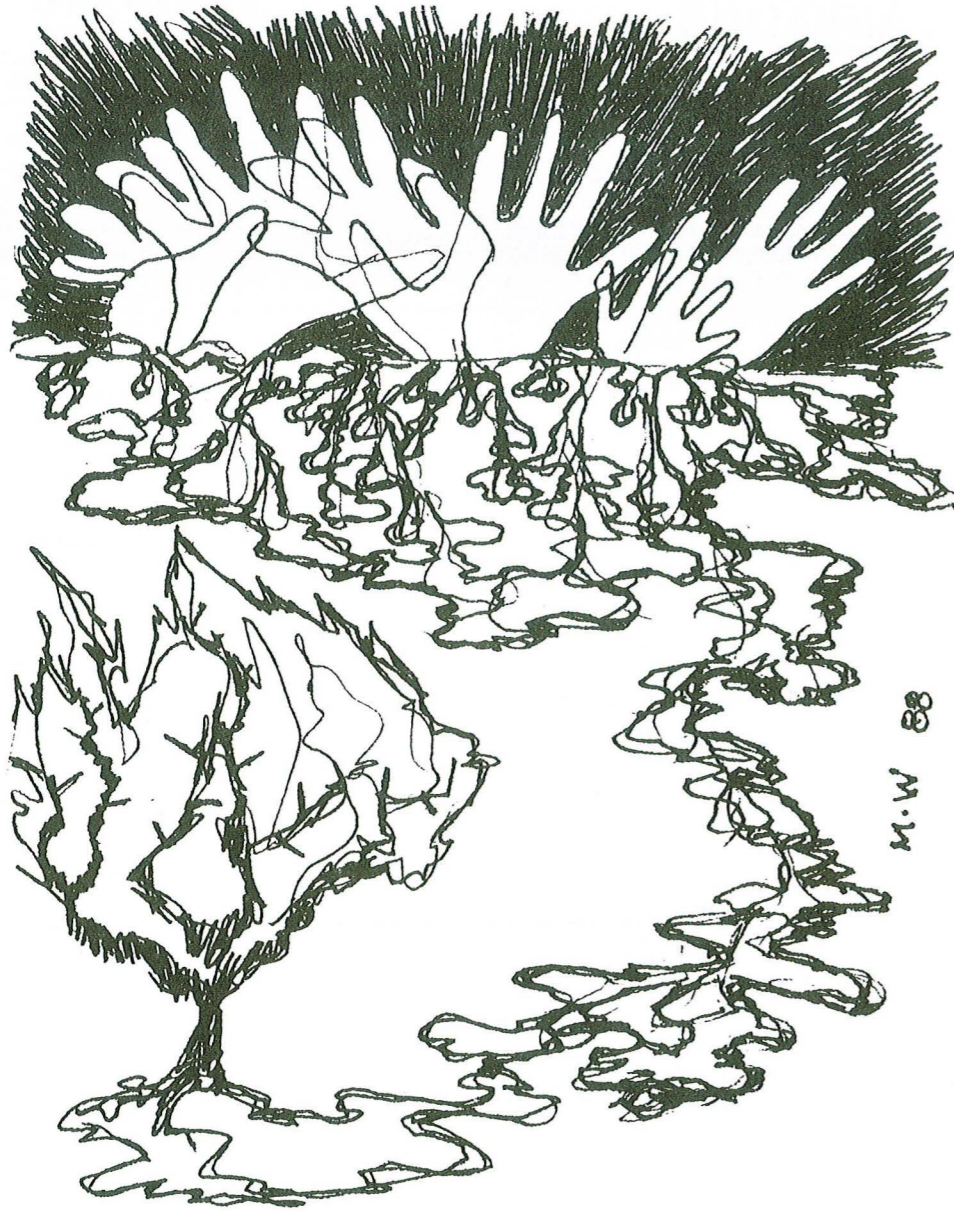
CHRIS WILLERTON

His red eyes and rush of hair gladdening
with my five dollars, he strides away
to thumb toward Nashville. Thick and odd
his words, dries gobs of glue.
"Are you goin' to church?" His mouth hung.
Today is Monday. I said, "Not now."
His mouth hung. "I got to I'm goin' to
Nashville but I kin . . ." I'm goin' to
"I don't mind hitchin' but I got
no food." His eyes hung.

I watch from the door his after-image down the
concrete and, in the open garage, our new car,
sign to him of someone who goes to church,
who could spare a five. In the deep shine on
the hood my face reclines in the shades.

Across the street the roofers pull off
handfuls of old scales,
sail them down to the rusty truck bed.
Like an angel unaware, a helper lugs new ones
up the slope.
One by one the shingles assemble under heaven.

Chris Willerton is the head of the Honors Program at Abilene Christian University and has published his poetry widely in literary journals.



Marjorie Wood is assistant to the Audio-Visual Librarian at Abilene Christian University. She is a member of the Artists' League of Texas and does freelance art work.

Icons of the True

DARRYL TIBBENS

He says He inhabits
the praise of His people.
Yes and more!
He inhabits the praise
of pin oak leaves
of iris petals
and the redwood scent,

of circles in a pool,
the colors of dawn
and in the night
He swims the star song.

Step outside
and join the praising host.
Use your faith to perceive
our Lord sitting in a tree,
laughing in the leaves.

— Kenneth A. Barnes

I'll never forget my first real encounter with Kenneth A. Barnes, a tall, quiet young man from Oklahoma City who with his wife Connie had been visiting our small congregation for several weeks. Kenny had a self-effacing air about him, always soft-spoken, so I did not really know him through our brief polite introductions at church. But I felt the need to make his acquaintance. There was something behind his silent reticence, though I did not know what. I did know that this young man (I supposed in his late twenties) was a carpenter by trade. That was about all I knew when the time came to make a call, to encourage Ken and Connie to join our fellowship.

As a college professor, frankly, I worried a bit about what we might talk about. Could a blue collar worker and an English professor find much common ground I wondered. Like some people long ago who encountered another mysterious Carpenter, I was fooled and surprised by this humble, gentle laborer.

Kenny, it turned out, is a gifted poet capable of considerable spiritual sensitivity. Not only

Darryl Tippens is director of the Center for Christian Writing at Abilene Christian University.

has he produced mature and deeply-moving verses marked by wit and insight — he clearly knows what it means to be an honest poet for God expressing the full range of human emotions, doubts and longings.

How many carpenters do you know who have portraits of George Herbert or John Milton hanging on their walls? Kenny does, for he deeply admires the great Christian artists of our past, and he has clearly learned from them, despite his limited formal academic training. Kenny also has a natural gift which he has continued to exercise, despite what he calls in his most recent collection of verse “A Rough Shaking,” i.e. a profound struggle with leukemia. Even in his deepest pain and darkest moments he has found a way to express his faith in his art.

When I think of the status of Christian art in Churches of Christ today, I inevitably think of Kenny — self-effacing, soft-spoken, largely unrecognized, brimming with talent and praise — a healer, a listener, and a servant. Despite limited opportunities, despite hardships including small audiences and sometimes terrible isolation and a fair amount of misunderstanding — artists like Kenny “step outside / and join the praising host.”

They write, they compose, and they draw because they must. Madeleine L'Engle writes: “The artist cannot hold back; it is impossible, because writing, or any other discipline of art, involves participation in suffering, in the ills and the occasional stabbing joys that come from being part of the human drama.” We have a good number of artists among us, like poet Barnes, who are praising God through their art. God is inhabiting their praises as he has promised, and we are pleased that readers of *Integrity* are joining in the celebration.

Christian art — serious, mature, well-composed work — is a rare thing among us. In the brief life of the Restoration Movement we have not generally produced noted poets, novelists, or painters. We have no Bachs, Van Goghs, C.S. Lewises, or Malcolm Mug-

geridges among us — no doubt for a number of reasons. Yet, I wish to prophesy a bit and suggest that this circumstance is changing. All about us today I see talented young Christians, men and women of deep faith like Kenny Barnes, who are exercising their artistic gifts to the glory of God. They love the Word of God, and in a variety of ways are laboring to incarnate that Living Word in words, in music, and in other media. Often quietly and in relative isolation, they are being true to their message, their Lord, and themselves. Perhaps it will take years, maybe a lifetime, before they are properly recognized — but they go on producing, creating, and celebrating the divine in human experience just the same.

The day for a mature Christian art *within* our fellowship has come — first because we have within our churches the poets, the artists, and the composers to produce it; but also because we have a maturing Christian community now ready to receive such work. Thank God. And, happily, some of these writers of promise appear in this issue of *Integrity*.

Despite their considerable diversity, these poems, meditations, short stories, and graphics unite certain common principles and themes which deserve mention. In these works, all of us, whether fellow artists or general readers, can spy some fundamentals of good art, especially Christian art.

First, one notices the fidelity of these artists to their own experience. Real artists, certainly Christian ones, must be faithful to what they know. They must be authentic and ruthlessly honest — “artists of integrity.” Otherwise, they betray the very Lord of Truth they claim to represent and worship. Without this devotion to truth, they cannot serve, delight, inspire, or heal. Not every subject is pleasant or antiseptic. We dwell in a fallen universe — and this fallenness is an essential aspect of the reality which our writers must mirror. This honest approach makes these works “icons of the true” (to borrow from Madeleine L’Engle). This commitment to truth makes these works “ring true” for us. Martin Buber has written: “You should utter words as though heaven were opened within them and as though you did not put the word into your mouth, but as though

you had entered the word.” The writers in this issue have demonstrated Buber’s call to “enter the word,” seriously and honestly.

Another feature of these artists is their understanding of the primacy of heart and imagination. They reveal unflinchingly that faith is more than facts, Christianity more than dogma. With Pascal they seem to say, “We know the truth, not only through reason, but also through the heart.” Or with Jeremiah, “When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you.” These writers and artists reveal the power of imagination to bring us closer to God.

Perhaps this truth is one reason our fellowship needs these gifted people so much. Our rationalist heritage has suppressed the role of emotion, imagination, and mystery in the life of the believer. Christian artists have an important vocation in the late twentieth century to recall us to the *full* experience of faith, including imagination and mystery. Many of us are uncomfortably like the character in John Elston’s novel: “Beneath the facade, beat the heart of a man losing touch.” If we have not lost our hearts entirely, we have been out of touch far too long.

Finally, these works, in wonderfully diverse ways, present a God Who unveils Himself in surprising ways, in unexpected places. Our Lord is not exclusively revealed in majestic sunsets or glorious anthems of angelic choirs. Sometimes He shows Himself in a child’s strange encounter in the Everglades, in the eyes of a drifter looking for a handout, or even in the pain of the nurse’s needle angling for the vein of a sadly discouraged patient. Ultimately, these artists understand that “All the combined powers of Sheol,” as Stephen Weathers surmises, cannot shield us from the unexpected blessing. The Presence is always here breaking in on us in surprising ways. Let us behold.

The selections which follow stand as first-fruits, I think, as pledges of good things to come. They flow from wise, compassionate hearts and offer glimpses of the pain and the glory of the Christian pilgrimage. They proclaim the poet’s faith that there is “news of God everywhere” if we will, in Kenny Barnes’ words, just “Step outside/and join the praising host.”

The Hammock

STEVE WEATHERS

³**hammock** /'hɑːm-ək/ n - s *often attrib* [origin unknown] **1:** **HUM-MOCK 2:** a fertile area in the southern U.S. (as Florida) that is often somewhat higher than its surroundings and is characterized by hardwood vegetation and soil of greater depth and containing more humus than that of the flatwoods or pinelands; *specif:* an island of dense tropical undergrowth in the Everglades

Sunday afternoons at my grandparents’ were frightening affairs. Not that I feared Daddy’s folks. His mother was an absolutely benign soul. A woman who has endured horrendous hardship in the Depression, she beamed with pride to be able to offer us cold rolls saved from Sunday dinner. My older brother and I ate the rolls, chewing glumly on a doughy sense of obligation. We didn’t know how to break the news to Grandma that bread was no longer a luxury and that we, consequently, could not share in her enthusiasm for it. She was an anachronism, but a harmless one.

Nor were these fears evoked by my grandfather. He was quiet with a strong stoic streak; a trait he developed after a mammoth business failure. I don’t know how much money he lost. My father allowed only that it involved almost an entire town somewhere in Georgia. But the bankruptcy had crushed the joy from his life as surely as a boy’s full weight pops the intestines from a toad. Grandpa had led the family south to Florida and had somehow managed to rear his children, but with little relish for the task. Now he sat on the front porch with a fly swatter, diverting himself by slaying whole battalions of the insect. At evening’s onset, Grandpa could be seen seated among innumerable corpses, his duty toward the world done for another day. But apart from this mild bloodlust, he too was harmless. No, I was not afraid of my father’s folks.

These visits to my grandparents’ were frightening because something lurked in an oak and magnolia hammock at the end of their road. The place was unearthly — even aside from its

Steve Weathers is a former missionary to Cypress and is now studying fiction writing at Florida State University.

hidden inhabitants — for a number of reasons. First of all, there were no birds there. I don’t know why. In addition, the ground was covered by a fine, white sand positively cold to the touch even on the hottest Sunday afternoon. It seemed the place was sanctified, set apart, immune to the extremes that raged around it. Moreover, one could not enter the shade of the live oaks, and trace his hand over their gray reptilian skins, without feeling that he had entered a surrealistic realm. Outside the hammock, the sun burned fiercely. Each object’s proper limits were defined. Inside the hammock, however, grays and muted greens mingled in the shadows, defying lines of demarcation. All was melded there. And the broad, brittle leaves of the magnolias fought the sun’s best efforts to import more warmth and visual clarity to the place. As a result, the skin on the back of my neck inevitably stirred and rearranged itself to accommodate the coolness, while my eyes strained vainly for better focus in the foreboding, birdless gloom.

Of course, I would have had no call to enter that gloom were it not for the fact that a small grocery store was situated on the far side of the hammock. It could be reached from the rear through these woods. So each Sunday my brother turned mendicant, moving from one adult to the other, soliciting alms. When he had finally collected enough for two ice cream sandwiches (and the coins miraculously came out to the required amount each time), we would explode through the screen door and sprint down the dirt road that dead ended in the hammock. There a shadowy trail continued — my

grandfather said it was an authentic Indian one — and twined effortlessly through the mint green deer moss, terminating at the backside of the grocer's cinder-block building. My brother and I would make our way to the store, pick and purchase the firmest ice cream sandwiches in the lot, and slowly retread our way back through the hammock. Each Sunday, the ritual was the same.

All this sounds innocuous enough, I suppose, but there was a point in the ceremony where one risked his life. At a particular turn in the trail a distant clearing was visible through the trees. There loomed a structure foreign in appearance — utterly alien, in fact, to the area's endemic architecture. Its facade was flat — no hint of a front porch — and was semicircular at the top, implying a rounded roof of some description. The elongated windows on its face picked up this motif and rested in similar circular fashion. A recessed cubicle in the facade housed a bell which tolled funereally in the evening hours. My brother said it was all remarkably like a photograph he had seen in his geography book, a photograph captioned: "Catholic Mission Outpost in Southwestern United States."

The most intimidating feature of all was an idol that stood in front of this structure, an idol that was half-hidden within its own small shelter. The faintly feminine statuary glowed startlingly white, but was otherwise indistinct at the distance from which we viewed it. At times, when our ice cream expedition ran a bit late, candles burned before this shrine, just visible in the last shrinking tatters of day. All in all, it was an awful place — in the archaic sense of that word. I was convinced that something more powerful than mortal man patiently bided its time here, awaiting an opportune moment to dematerialize me.

I never mentioned any of this to my parents. I felt certain that they would immediately forbid our Sunday journeys were they to discover the life-threatening lengths we went to for each ice cream. But apparently my brother somehow, at some time, broached the subject with them. For he produced several scraps of relevant information. The inhabitants of the strange structure were "them Catholics," and the house was

actually a church. (I was soon to learn that it included a nunnery, but my parents had not been so specific.) Catholics would not permit people to get married. Catholics forbade folks to read the Bible. And to this data, my brother added his personal opinion that it was they who had killed all the birds in the hammock. For pure meanness.

On one occasion I remember asking my brother just how dangerous "them Catholics" could really be. I did not plan to marry, nor was I an avid Bible reader. Perhaps our fears were, after all, exaggerated. My sibling admitted that Daddy had not gone into great detail. But he also added that when my father spoke the words, he had uttered them in the same dark tone that characterized his periodic warnings about "them niggers." That settled the question for me. If "them Catholics" were as dangerous as "them niggers," my brother and I were bustling past all the combined powers of Sheol in our trips through the hammock. For I knew — that is, I had gathered — that the Negroes were responsible for most of the world's misfortune. They had killed, among many others, my grandmother's uncle in a big war. In Atlanta, they were threatening the front seats on city buses and the white water fountain at Sears Roebuck. Farther north, their forces had entire Caucasian communities under occupation, the inhabitants fearful for their lives. So that settled it for me. If Daddy spoke of Catholics with the same dread evoked by Negroes, I would never again negotiate the pathway through the hammock.

At least, that was my resolve. But I could never seem to remain firm to it. Each Sunday, my brother would walk slowly and tantalizingly down the dirt road toward the woods, periodically pausing to look back at me. I would stand at Grandma's gate, clutching the rough-cut lumber with Odyssean strength, but only for a moment. All at once I would relent and he would laugh at my cowardice and I would threaten to return to the house and he would hush and we would once again enter the unearthly half-light of the hammock.

I did succeed in extracting a promise from my brother that we would not look in the direction of the Catholics when the trail took its

peculiar turn near their clearing. For some reason, this seemed to me an appropriate talisman against the concentrated mana of the place. He agreed, and we studiously turned our heads away from their haunt at that juncture in the trip. Thus, I could never seem to totally renounce this afternoon trek that invested our lives with meaning for another week. I could never seem to wean myself from the mystic call of the hammock.

One afternoon we dawdled long at the store. The grocer had insisted that there were no ice cream sandwiches in stock that week; the truck had simply not brought them. So we lingered over Nutty Buddies and Push-Ups and Fudgesicles, along with more mundane choices like ice cream in a paper cup, noteworthy only because it came with a wooden spoon that could be sharpened into a functional dagger. My brother and I finally settled on our separate choices and left the store. We should have noticed the irregularity in the ceremony. It portended some evil. The ice cream sandwiches had never been missing before; something was undoubtedly askew. But that is easy to see in retrospect. At the time we thought little of it. We walked on, sucking in silence.

We were faithfully averting our eyes from the vicinity of the church when my brother froze in the pathway before me. I had been intent on my Fudgesicle and so crashed into his back, nearly impaling myself on the cold wooden shaft. My counterpart cast one glance in the forbidden direction of the Catholics and went rigid. He hissed horribly over his shoulder, "It's them! Get off the trail!" With those words he pitched himself into a convenient yaupon thicket. His unfinished Nutty Buddy dropped into the dirt, its hard brown cone pointing heavenward like a steeple of mute supplication.

My brother was safe. But I was unable to move. For I too had stolen a glimpse in the direction of the Catholics and what I saw there atrophied my limbs. A line of dark figures was threading its way into the hammock, attempting to intersect the trail we were traveling. They were obviously women and obviously devotees of the white idol; the last in line had paused contemplatively before the image. Now they were all bearing down on me, black robes

leaving the vegetation waving in their wake, white linen haloes framing each downturned face. The afternoon's dying light clung to the golden chains and crosses that swung menacingly from side to side. *So this is what them Catholics look like*, I thought grimly. *Pity this sight must cost me my life.*

I knew of nothing to do but lock my eyelids and await the fate that approached. My brother was whispering urgently to me, begging me for the sake of our mother's memory to run while there was yet time. I could do nothing of the kind. All strength had evaporated from my veins. Even my sticky grip had relaxed, allowing the half-finished Fudgesicle to plop quietly onto the pathway at my feet. I pressed my eyes more tightly closed and steeled myself against the blast of energy that would shortly reduce me to ashes. My time was nearing; I could hear the black friction of their fabric rubbing past twigs and leaves on my immediate left.

Now they were on the trail, surrounding me, their feet plodding softly in the cool sand. All at once, I felt a hand come to rest gently on my cowlick. It then lifted and was gone. For an instant I thought that I had imagined the sensation, but almost immediately the touch was repeated. In fact, each time one of the priestesses passed, she, in her turn, lowered another soft palm atop my head. Petrified in mid-trail, I helplessly surrendered to the recurring gesture. Soon I didn't bother to wince or flinch, convinced that it would avail nothing in the presence of this power. So the touching continued. And when the last set of footsteps had faded, I had been blessed no less than twelve times.

That evening, as my brother and I stepped from the birdless quiet of the hammock, a white moon was ballooning its way into the blue overhead. We struggled to make some sense of the thing that had befallen me. My sibling expressed his certainty that I had been hexed. Those touches had mediated some impalpable energy, he explained. A spell had been cast; I would never again be the same. I tried, albeit feebly, to laugh off his superstition. But there are times when I think my brother was right.

Intercepted Correspondence

The following "Intercepted Correspondence" is a continuation of a feature we began in the January/February 1988 issue of *Integrity*. These letters are *Integrity's* version of C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* and more recent Os Guinness' *Gravedigger Files*.

To refresh your memory, we have an im-

aginary setting where Bruce accidentally comes across these letters in his computer class. Bruce thought he would warn the rest of us of what may be going on under our very noses. The nefarious teacher Apollyon continues his instructions to the young devil Ichabod.

My dear Agitator,

You are now in an ideal situation. The disruptive aberrations of "Scooter" Barton and the distraught relatives of his young victim give you a marvelous opportunity upon which you must capitalize. It is time to foment finger-pointing, stern accusations, and vehement denials of guilt. In a false sense of honor, the girl will not reveal the identity of the father of her child-to-be. This leaves him free to continue in his successful sexual exploits. In self-excusing defense, the parents will, quite naturally, ignore their own contributions to their daughter's problem, hiding behind the platitudes "She's always been such a good girl," (by "good," they mean she never complained or seemed disrespectful because they supplied her every demand), and the old incredulous question, "Where did we go wrong," (a question asked, not for honest or critical response, but for a reassuring answer, "It certainly isn't *your* fault; you've given her the very best of everything. . ."). They will ignore her openly flirtatious manner, immodest modes of dress, questionable companions, and self-centered life. But believe me, Scooter read all the signs loud and clear.

Being on top of the situation, you will know which course of action to advise in this circumstance: should there be an abortion, or adoption? can she be induced into deep depression, and even a suicidal state? Above all, make certain that those closest to her offer a kind of sham sympathy which she will recognize as ill-concealed accusation. It will enhance our posi-

tion in many ways. Let your own familiarity and proximity guide your course of action. Remember: whatever you decide upon must leave Scooter altogether untarnished. He is too valuable to lose.

I must decline any lengthy comments upon the Adversary's purposes in creating His creatures capable of such a variety of sins: I revel in the fact, even without understanding it. The most mystifying element, to me, is the claim (and the universal evidence of the fact) that He can continue to love them despite their unanimous participation in these disobediences, and that He has paid such a dear price to effect a reconciliation! The deep depression of Brother Tenebrae is ultimately based upon his failure to understand precisely this point. He perceives himself to be altogether unworthy of any respect or love from either God or man. I shall not be surprised at news of his suicide: thus he will have snuffed out his candles. If this is not his course of action, his usefulness may or may not be limited by the type and degree of his depression. Certain types attract, whereas others repel. The first elicits sympathy, the second revulsion. You must get to know him better if he is to be ignored or manipulated.

From the standpoint of effectual use, it matters not at all which of the "twin poles of sin" you utilize, the intellectual or the sensual: the consequences may be equally evaluated as long as a proper understanding and careful discretion are used to determine to which class the

potential victim belongs. Your analyses are altogether accurate. With both Scooter and Tenebrae, there is no question; in other instances, you may require more discernment.

Stick with your work in the Worship committee. They seem to be nearly ripe for earnest and even bitter contention. I particularly hope to hear of one of the prominent individuals who is willing to get involved in a pie-in-the-face-if-my-side-loses contest. Getting Whitesoul would be an astounding coup; but that is most unlikely. Should you succeed in introducing this Crown Prince of all Gimmicks, we'll have an excellent base on which to build. The media must be present to record the moment of splash-down impact. A front-page photo and/or a television replay would have tremendous potential for our cause.

I must sternly rebuke you for your closing remarks as you criticize certain gimmicks which turn your stomach, or those in which you say you would not participate. Don't you realize how close you are to treading on rebellious ground? You have not been sent to Broad Way to satisfy your preferences, but to carry out a portion of our master plan in the seduction of the Enemy's people. If you are asked to take up a kazoo and play it, take up two, and play them both at once! If you are the one who is to take a chocolate cream pie in the face, be unquestionably ready. And this without either hesitation or resentment. The alternatives are altogether ominous. I insist upon your unquestioning loyalty and obedience at all times. Having done so commendably to the present, give me no reason to doubt your dependability in the future.

With grave concern,

Uncle Apollyon

Dear Uncle Apollyon,

Thank you for your usual good advice and your commendations. I submit myself to your chastening instructions, even to the point of

kazoo playing, if it becomes necessary. Right now, that development would be preferable to what has actually transpired. I'm afraid the somber events of the past few months, about which I was exulting in my last letter, have driven the people at Broad Way to include both confession and praise in their services on a regular basis. This paradoxical combination provides a double whammy against the directions in which we would lead them to think, since both activities inspire gratitude toward the Enemy. It surely shows our Infernal Father's shrewdness that his first principle regarding what the Enemy is pleased to call "sin" is "Never admit any wrongdoing," for that naturally results in submitting to His arbitrary will, which seems inevitably to be followed by purgation in the fires of discipline and possession by a simpering thankfulness for His "deliverance from sin." And then they go right out of the frying pan into the spire with their praise-worship! They've chucked out most of the dull, lifeless stuff that used to characterize their services. It's bad enough that they have started using some of these uninhibited, hand-clapping little praise songs — if that were all, we could merely persuade them to cut out everything else and feel super-spiritual for doing so; but they've also begun to sing some of the best old songs with a realization of what they mean. This has got to stop!

I'm happy to report that this new approach to things did Brother Tenebrae no good. He took an overdose of sleeping pills last Saturday night and is no longer among the living. The darkness we put in his mind finally prevailed and persuaded him that the sinfulness of mankind — his own included — was greater than God's power and mercy. Whether his last act was sufficient to damn him I can't tell, of course; but at the very least he has removed the possibility of his life being used for the glory of the Enemy, and he has inflicted great pain on those who loved him. You and I know that the Great Transformer will probably bring some good out of even this horrible event, but I shall try to make sure that the congregation sees only the umbra of futility that covers it now.

Curses on it! Brother Whitesoul has recovered from his depression and now

preaches and (what is more distressing) leads with greater power than ever. Having endured with the congregation through its low time, he speaks with that strange authority that comes from accepting the suffering servanthood so ridiculously recommended by the Enemy and so maddeningly exemplified by His Son. He has encouraged the congregation in its current binge of self-examination and prayer, and he has made a concentrated effort to give the silly little communion service a special place in their spiritual "recovery." He tells them that they are in a better frame of mind to experience that ceremony now than they were when they thought everything was all right, because it was first instituted at the very point that Jesus was about to be betrayed and killed. I used to be able to participate in that ridiculous exercise with no discomfort at all, but now I keep remembering that our Diabolical Leader had one of his own people at that first Supper, and that the very worst the betrayer could do was instrumental in the Enemy's doing the very best that He could do.

But let's talk about more pleasant things. Summertime offers its special set of opportunities to mislead the faithful. Vacations upset the regular schedule and provide perfect excuses to neglect habitual acts of spiritual exercise. I am delighted to see people take trips that encourage them to overeat physically and starve themselves spiritually, often while unwisely increasing their indebtedness and reducing their contributions to church and charity. Also, the warm weather brings out preoccupation with boats and other recreational vehicles, bodily exhibitionism, and burnt offerings to the sun (euphemistically called sun-bathing), all of which constitute the kinds of distractions we find ways to turn to our purposes. And I like the general assumption that churches, like water heaters, are to be turned down to "vacation low" for three or four months. Imagine, the Enemy's troops unilaterally declaring a cessation of hostilities! It makes me feel like a scavenger on a battlefield, walking around looting dead bodies. I might observe, too, that the after-effects of vacationing are often as fertile for us as the time spent away; people who are exhausted and not very positive about get-

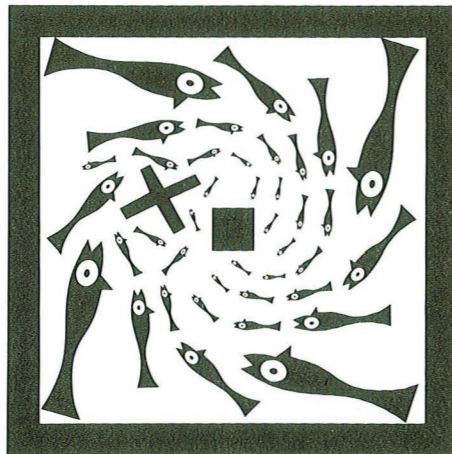
ting back to work should be easy to use to make everybody around them miserable for a while. Too bad the summer doesn't last longer; but then again, we heed the Enemy's admonition better than many of His own adherents do, since we work both "in season, and out of season."

Don't worry about "Scooter's cover being blown. The girl has gone to live with an aunt, and she'll stay there to get a job and finish her education. She didn't squeal on "Scooter," and I think she still hopes he'll come around to marrying her someday. The baby will be born and put up for adoption, in spite of a great deal of pressure from the girl's peers to get her to have an abortion. I'm proud to say at least that the congregation's new-found humility and conscience has not enabled them to deal with "shameful" situations like this in any way that would be a threat to our objectives. I happen to know that a certain young man in the fellowship has developed AIDS, and he didn't get it from a blood transfusion, either. I can't wait to get the gossip going about that!

Infernally yours,

Ichabod

"Cancerous Soul" by Mel Ristau



Reflections on the Gift of Storytelling

SANDRA PIERSON

Sandra Pierson is a speech pathologist with the Headstart Program in Abilene, Texas.

Our children enjoy a unique birthright. Their father is a storyteller. This is partly owing to his gift of gab and partly to his upbringing in a rural community where entertainment was, more often than not, self-generated. Not long ago our family traveled 2000 miles for a church-family reunion. We named our journey "The Great Adventure" and tent-camped our way to New England. To pass the long hours on the road we exchanged stories and the children asked their father to read OLD YELLER, which he did — from beginning to end. Eventually we reached our destination, a scenic retreat in the hills of New Hampshire. One by one the families arrived and the faces the children had seen in photo albums became flesh. As the children heard reflections on the past and dreams for the future, the stories of their parents became part of their own stories.

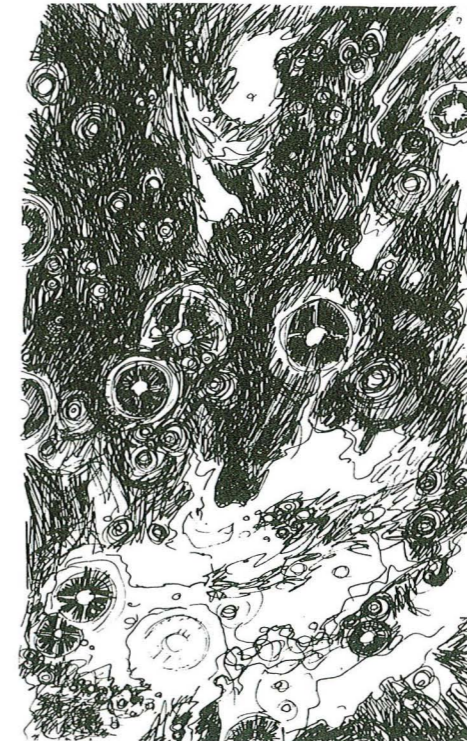
Leaving the reunion weekend, we continued the Great Adventure and traveled to New York City to climb the Statue of Liberty. Poignant photographs in the Liberty Museum told stories of hopeful immigrants and we related to our children what we knew of our own immigrant "fathers and mothers." We then journeyed to Washington, D.C. and were especially moved by the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Memorial. These evoked stories of turbulent times; stories that should not be forgotten. As we related to our children the stories behind the symbols, I was reminded of the same symbols used by the Nation of Israel, a people called to remember what God had done and was doing in their lives. The symbolism in the Passover Feast and the monuments erected of stones were memorials which would prompt children to ask of their fathers and mothers "What does it mean? Tell me the story."

Landon Saunders once said, "To know the Great Story, and our role in it, gives meaning

and purpose to everything we do. What we need is not an easier life, but deeper understanding of the life we have. . . . It is not enough to know the Great Story unless we know it as our story." The Word of God which was spoken in the beginning continues to unfold the mysteries of God. We enjoy a unique birthright. Our Father is a storyteller.

"And the Glory. . ."

by Marjorie Wood



The Clinically Depressed Christian

A short story by

JACK WELCH

Jack Welch, an English professor at Abilene Christian University, is also involved in the school's new Center for Christian Writing. He is author of the recently published novel *Feeling Free*.

A man at the Christian university where I teach asks me just before chapel how I am feeling.

"Well," I say, picking up a copy of *Great Songs of the Church Revised*, "the doctor has reduced the number of pills I take from eight-teen to six."

"Oh," he smiles. He begins to fumble around in his red metal-and-plush theater seat in search of a hymn book, but I have only one within reach. "That's good news," he afterthoughts.

"No," I say. "They've given up hope that medicine can help." I hand him my hymn book.

He takes the book. "Don't you want it?" he asks.

"I feel as though it won't do me any good."

Having finally comprehended what I have been telling him, he now looks shocked. He has brown hair, a brown mustache, and the smooth pink skin of an innocent baby. Shock does not become him. I wonder if God has sent me to him to put some scars of the human condition on his face.

"I'll use yours," I say reassuringly, "if you'll share it with me."

His mouth drops open, and I see some silver fillings glint far back in his molars.

"How sweet, how heavenly is the sight/When those that love the Lord," someone baritone into the microphone at the front of the great chapel hall which also doubles as a basketball gymnasium. This brother beside me gives me one last sideways glance and begins to tenor. I wait until the line, "**In one another's peace delight**" has passed before I begin to bass.

Prayer requests are intoned from the podium by a tall, tanned man with a bald, bland cranium. Several thousand students decrescendo their conversations. "Brother Marcus, as most

of you know, is a professor of communications, and as some of you know, Brother Marcus has a daughter who has been undergoing painful cancer treatments. Now — and only a few of you know this — Brother Marcus' wife is at this very moment undergoing cancer surgery at the West Texas Baptist Hospital. Finally, and, I think, none of you know this, Brother Marcus' other daughter has a large growth in her stomach, but, out of fear, she has not gone to have it diagnosed."

The student body is now as silent as one man standing alone at night on the West Texas plains. The student who is to pray clomps to the microphone. He is wearing gray cowboy boots, faded Wrangler jeans, a blue cowboy shirt, and a blond mustache that matches his blond, sun-beam hair. I remember that in a formal chapel speech he had regaled us with a joke about a man with a harelip who sold toothbrushes by convincing people that the cookies they were sampling had been made from horse manure. He also, in that speech, broke into a song, which he'd written, about how God was a little like his horse. As he began to pray, I also remember how he sang a song at a recent campus concert called "Fat Gal."

"I just want to come to you, God" he says, "because I just want to thank you for the opportunity to just come before your throne to just thank you for our friends. We realize that friends are everything, God, and we just want you to know that you are riding with us down every trail no matter how much catclaw grows among the chapparal. And, God, we just want to pray for this Mr. Marcus, too. We don't know why things happen to people to cause so much pain, Father, but we just pray that you'll relieve his suffering. . . ."

I yank the prayer to myself, ". . . and, Holy Father, bless that suffering daughter in her fear.

Why, oh God, we Christians fear? Forgive me my fear, Holy Father."

After the University's president has given us a lesson on the value of work ("If any would not work, neither let him eat"), the assembly of several thousand students is dismissed for lunch.

The colleague who stands beside me hands me back the hymn book. I take it and say, "Thanks."

"Well, that was a good chapel," he says, "and now I must move along to the faculty dining room."

"Have you worked?" I ask.

"What's that?" he calls over his shoulder. He doesn't slow down.

"You can't have lunch if you haven't. . . ." but he's gone into a swirl of students who are stampeding to lunch without, I'm reasonably confident, a thought about whether or not they have worked for their lunch.

I slide *Great Songs of the Church Revised* back into the space between the armrest and the seat bottom where it will remain during the enthusiasm of tonight's basketball game. Do students ever take them out and read them, I wonder, during half-time? I heard of a man who read the hymnal's index during a sermon recently in which the preacher bellowed that our rural, lower-middle-class, Texas church was "world weary."

"Oh no!" I thought when I heard. 'Aubrey Beardsley, Hermann Goering, and Orson Welles were 'world weary,' We're. . . well, naive."

I sit back down into my seat to wait for the throng to thread its way out the narrow doors of the coliseum. At this time yesterday I, myself, was entering the intensive care unit of West Texas Baptist Hospital. The admissions clerk had insisted on wheeling me to my bed even though I felt well enough to walk. Despite being in this unit several times before, I'm still astonished at the pale, wrinkled skin of those patients who lie on their backs in their raised beds with tubes poking in and out of them. Their limpness, their white garments, their nimble nurses with pursed lips and furrowed brows, and their cluttered machines with dials and digits — ah, they cause my already twitching

heart to twitch the more.

At my glass and aluminum alcove, my clerk wheels me in and a nurse in a dark blue shirt and pants uniform smiles her welcome. "We don't quite have your room ready," she says. "People are sooo sick today."

I nod to the raised white bed with its three complexly folded sheets. "The bed is ready," I suggest.

"I'll be right back," she says. She tosses me a lightweight white cotton gown with complicated cloth-knot buttons. "Slip into this."

"May I wear my shorts?"

At the sliding glass door she looks straight ahead but nods once.

As I take off my sports coat, my shirt, my tan trousers, the room freezes up. I stand thin and middle-aged in my white briefs trying to button those knots on the sleeves of the gown. "I can't even button a hospital gown," I say. With only one button on each sleeve pushed into holes, I climb onto the bed and slide down between the cold, smooth sheets.

My nurse returns with a maroon plastic wash pan stacked full of items for me: a mercury thermometer, a blue toothbrush, a plastic bottle of yellow mouthwash, and a packet of needles and tubes. Her complexion looks suddenly brown and suntanned, her lips ruby red. "Now, we need to get your IV started," she says. "Do you know what time they want to shock you?"

I wince. "As far as I'm concerned, the sooner the better."

She laughs. "I can understand that." She comes over with a sheet of paper and a black pen. "Please sign this form granting us the permission to cardiovert you."

I take the pen.

"You know what a cardioversion is, I suppose." I nod, but she continues. "Your heart has another electrical path for getting its job done, that's all. The shock will try to re-establish the original pattern."

I feel a little less freakish.

She takes away the consent form and pen and returns with a thick white needle with a clearly visible hole in the end, as though someone with one swift slash had whittled off its end. "Which arm do you want?" she says.

I extend my right arm and point to the fold

at mid-arm. "It's been stabbed many times," I say.

She leans over me, tapping my veins with practiced index finger. She flips two likely spots on my forearm then slaps them. "Squeeze hard," she says.

I squeeze my first and begin to pray for my veins to pop up like Popeye's.

"They're not the worst I've seen," she finally says. She smears me with alcohol. "I'm not gonna lie to you. This is gonna hurt."

I turn my eyes away while she pierces my skin and camouflaged vein. "I don't blame it for hiding," I think. I look at my arm again and watch while she moves the needle forward and backward. It's obvious that she is missing the vein.

"I had it for a minute," she says. "I must've gone all the way through." She tries looping the needle while it is under my skin, and I hope that she succeeds in somersaulting into a vein.

"No good," she finally says. "I'm sooo so sorry. I'll have to try the other place." She makes a bloody exit and clamps down on the hole with an alcohol flavored cotton ball. "Hold that, please."

I hold the hole and watch this time while she flips and slaps the other spot. Her lips purse up in her determination not to fail me again. I watch. Again, the smear of the alcohol patch and again the stab of the large white needle. I close my eyes for a moment and try to think of pleasant days, but she brings me back. "I got some nice blood that time, but it's not enough. I'm going for Nell." She withdraws the needle like a fencer withdrawing from a touche. "Believe me, I'm not the worst at this sort of thing, but there is someone who's better." She calls over her shoulder to another nurse. "Lori, call Nell down here, please." Because my blood is medicated with an anticoagulant, I am now holding two holes, neither of which have stopped bleeding.

Nell is near retirement age, wears a sweater, skirt, and white jacket, has short hair, yellow bangs, and professional manicured fingernails. I decide that she is a person of style, and I hope that her pink enameled fingers will find the perfect entry. She is in no hurry. She looks my arm over as though she were considering buy-

ing it. I decide that the secret of success for inserting the large intravenous needles must be in the selection. Up and down my arm her practical eyes search. I point to the middle of the arm where so many others have found pay-blood. She shakes her head. "These IV needles stay put", she says. "If you bend your arm — wham, ripped vein."

I take her word for it. She lingers long on the back of my hand where smaller blue veins loop innocently over the fan-shaped arrangement of bones. She finds one she thinks she may use and gives it the flip-and-slap treatment. "Yes," she says and brings on the alcohol and the needle. She aims first north then northeast than, suddenly, north-northeast. In goes the fat needle, but one look at her face tells that it's not her usual perfect job. She frowns, determined not to botch it up. Her reputation is on the line. She maneuvers and twists and loops and jabs and millimeters back.

"I thought prayer was supposed to help," she mutters to herself.

I let my head sink back onto my pillow and notice that every muscle in my body has tensed. "It won't work," I think. "They won't be able to cardiovert me." I know some things without being told. It's foreknowledge of some kind. My heart will not change.

"There," she says with the triumph of a pole vaulter. "I *did* get it. Finally."

"Thank you," I say, but I do not tell her that she has wasted her time, that she is giving her best for a failure and a pessimist.

She is not gone long before my dark blue nurse comes back with the defibrillator, its electrical paddles tossed casually on the top of its tan control machine. Close behind is the anesthesiology team.

The number two man on the team is an aging male nurse. His green name tag calls him "Ray." "Weight?" Ray says.

"One eighty-five."

"No. You don't look that heavy." Ray writes something down on his clipboard. Ray is wearing green surgical pants and shirt and a white jacket. He turns to Dr. Swip, the anesthesiologist, a very thin young man with a brown curly beard. "I want to give him something to make him feel good, all right?"

Dr. Swip nods once.

"Now," Ray says, fiddling with my IV needle, "we're going to make this a good trip."

"Wanna put this up your nostrils?" my dark blue nurse says.

In the periphery of my vision others are beginning to mill around into the room. I glimpse my cardiologist, who has planned all this in hopes of ridding me of my irregular heart beat. My atrium is now fluttering at about four hundred beats a minute while my ventricle hobbles along at about eighty, give or take ten, depending on the deca-minute.

Ray puts something firm around my left arm. It appears to be breathing. Ray shouts, "This is a blood pressure cuff. You know what that is?"

I nod.

"It's automatic," Ray calls out.

"Your nostrils," my nurse repeats. "I don't like *anybody* messing around with *my* nostrils."

I lift my left hand and take the U-shaped tube which she is forcing on me. "Put these little horns here up your nose," she says.

I follow orders.

"Feeling good?" Ray sings out.

I smell the oxygen surge through my nose, I feel as though body is levitating, and I sense a warm hand in my left hand. My cardiologist says, "It won't be long now."

"Do you remember the last time?" I say to the anesthesiologist.

"Well, when was it. . ."

"I'm going. . .going. . ."

All is black. Time, oh time. . .gone, too. Yellowish green lights and a rending of my chest and black. . .and black.

No one is there in my alcove, so I shut my eyes again. I think, "I felt it, again. They didn't give me enough stuff again." Black. I open my eyes and look around.

INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

A nurse in a white pants suit and wearing her blonde hair in a pony tail is taking the blood pressure on my left arm. "Are you all right?" she shouts.

I nod.

"Are you SURE?"

I do a quick check and then. . . I am able to discern the quirky antirhythm of my heart. "Atrial fibrillation," I think.

The nurse looks into my eyes and confirms. Failed.

I stand up from my chapel seat. People are still swirling around me. Time. Oh time. I see the bearded colleague just now going out of the auditorium. "And what will become of that smooth face," I wonder, "when three of the women in his family have cancer or when his own chest is burned with defibrillator paddles?"

I am tired.

My colleague is coming back, his smooth face smiling. He extends his hand as though we're in church. "Biofeedback," he says.

"Beg pardon?"

"Biofeedback. Get this book. *Mood, Memory, and Miracle*. It'll make you feel fresh and positive."

"Am I stale and negative?"

He stops smiling. I repent making him unhappy. He's only trying to be a Christian to me.

He raises his index finger and emphasizes his words. "Biofeedback."

"Thank you," I say.

He leaves me again, and I wish I could honestly say that some psycho-bio-religio combination would perk me up, but my perception is lucid, and what I see makes me a pessimistic christian. Oh, I realize that if I had faith, I wouldn't be pessimistic. But I *do* have faith. I confess that to all. But what I *see* makes me pessimistic. You've seen what I see. Don't you agree?

The Master Vine and the New Branch

HOLLY ALLEN

Holly Allen has a Master's degree in Learning Disabilities and teaches part-time at Abilene Christian University. She is active with the Pro-Life Movement.

New Branch: Master, I've been surveying the vineyard and I've noticed that you could use some more branches. I thought I might pour out some new shoots and cover that bald spot over by the wall.

Master Vine: Dear child, you are new in my vineyard. You may not know that it is I, the vine, who produces new branches.

NB: (disappointed) Oh. Well. . . You probably ought to be putting some new branches over there, or that space will be wasted.

MV: The Vinedresser and I have been discussing that very spot, and we are considering cultivating ground to produce new branches. I'm glad to know my newest branch is so energetic and full of ideas.

NB: Oh I am! I am! (excited) If I can't do the branches, then I guess I'll get started on my fruit. There are some luscious-looking deep red grapes over in the south side of the vineyard. I think I'll produce my first crop like those.

MV: (amused) My beloved little one, you do not know? I also produce the grapes.

NB: You do the grapes, too!!!!? *You* get to do the branches! Let *me* do the grapes.

MV: I'm sorry, dear one, that is my job. I do the fruit.

NB: Well, it seems to me that you have a big enough job just producing the branches. There are lots of bald spots around here that could be cultivated, and I've seen some branches over by the watchtower

that look pretty dry and useless to me. Why don't you just do the branches and *I'll* do the fruit.

MV: Listen, my child. You do not realize it yet, but you are unable to produce your own fruit. You receive all that you are from me, the master vine. I am your life source and strength. In a short time, as you allow my life and strength to flow into you, small but sweet fruit will begin to form on you. It won't be long. Be patient.

NB: But if *you* do the branches, and *you* do the fruit, what am *I* supposed to do? I don't want to sit around all day soaking in the sun, watching all the other branches bear huge bunches of grapes while I do nothing. What am *I* supposed to be doing all day?

MV: What a young twig you are!! So anxious to be a strong, powerful, productive branch. It delights me to see such desire in you. And there *is* something you can do.

NB: Oh, tell me, what is it?

MV: Abide in me.

NB: Is that all? Abide in you! Oh, surely there is something other than that for me to do. I wish you'd let me do the fruit.

MV: Dear little one (with compassion), look over there near the watchtower. Do you see that large, withered branch leaning against the gate?

NB: Yes, I see him. What happened to him?

MB: That branch was once a strong, thriving producer of the sweetest fruit ever harvested from this vineyard. Ah! it was a robust, enthusiastic part of me.

NB: What happened?

MB: (slowly) He ceased abiding in me. He began to notice how the other branches admired his strength, his beauty, his produce. He began to believe that he was indeed quite beautiful. He ceased listening to me in order to spend more time preening and supervising his growth. As he spent less and less time with me, smaller and smaller amounts of my life-giving strength poured into him. The fruit at his further extremities began to wither and die. I knew what he needed, but he would not listen to me.

NB: What did he need?

MV: He needed to submit to the Vinedressers pruning.

NB: What's pruning?

MV: Most strong, healthy branches need pruning occasionally. When a branch becomes too large and produces more than it is able to support, it needs to be cut back.

NB: Cut back!? Cut back!? That sounds painful.

MV: Yes, I suppose it does sound painful. But branches must be pruned or they will die. Pruning brings the branch closer to its life source. Then it is again able to produce abundant, sweet fruit.

NB: What will happen to him, now that he is dry and useless?

MV: He will be taken out and burned by the Vinedresser. Oh, my heart aches for

him. Please little one, heed his story. Abide in me.

NB: Oh, I will, I will. Tell me what I need to do.

MV: You have already begun. Abiding in me includes conversing with me and listening to me as you have been doing these last few moments.

NB: That part is easy.

MV: Abiding also includes heeding what I say, obeying me. It also means submitting to pruning by the Vinedresser.

NB: That will be harder, I think. But if I do all of this, will I have big luscious grapes like that branch over on the south side?

MV: Oh my audacious branchchild!!! Those grapes are rare and special; they will be made into exclusive red table wines. The Vinedresser and I need you for another purpose. Your fruit, a deep purple grape, will be used in the making of jams and jellies.

NB: Jams and jellies!!! Jams and jellies. Is that all?! That's not very important. Couldn't I bear more important fruit than that?

MV: Dear child, remember what I said. Abide in me. Abiding means conversing, listening, heeding, and obeying. I can see that you are going to be a vigorous, thriving branch in this vineyard. The Vinedresser will be pleased to hear about his newest branch. Do you have any other questions today? I will look forward to sharing with you again tomorrow. Until then, be thinking about what I said. Abide, Abide.

NB: Abide. (with finality). Abide. I wonder if maybe I could ask about those green seedless grapes; I have heard they make good raisins. Abide, abide.